



Conversations Among Ruins

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CONVERSATIONS AMONG RUINS is a portrait of a descent into madness, and the potential of finding salvation there.

While in detox, Daniel Stavros, a young, dual diagnosed* professor meets and falls in love with the cryptic Mimi Dexter. But Mimi has secrets and, strangely, a tattoo identical to a pendant Daniel's mother gave him right before she died.

Drawn together by broken pasts, they pursue a twisted, tempestuous romance. When it ends, a deteriorating Stavros seeks refuge at a mountain cabin where a series of surreal experiences brings him face to face with something he's avoided all his life: himself.

Though miles away, Mimi's actions run oddly parallel to Daniel's. Will either be redeemed, or will both careen toward self-destruction?

*The term dual diagnosed refers to someone suffering from a mood disorder (e.g., depression) and chemical dependency.

Conversations Among Ruins Details

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From Reader Review Conversations Among Ruins for online ebook

Chris says

College professor Daniel Stavros is falling apart. Assailed by twin demons of alcoholism and mental illness, he has given up on everything except for, maybe, love. Like his protagonist, author Matthew Peters staggers from profane to poetic as he takes the reader on a journey that is at once painful, hopeful, horrific, and even mystical. By the end of this novel, you'll find yourself wondering what was real and what wasn't before realizing it just doesn't matter. Inspired by the deep tradition of magical realism, Peters merges past and present, truth and fiction, to weave a psychological portrait of a man desperately trying to save himself -- from himself.

Steve Lindahl says

Early on in *Conversations Among Ruins* the ex wife of Daniel Stavros tells him: *Dreaming is what gave rise to the idea of the soul*. This statement seems to capture what I felt after reading Matthew Peters' powerful novel. Stavros is an alcoholic who slips in and out of reality in a way that causes reality, imagination, and dreams to become indistinguishable.

The book starts in a detox center. Stavros is there because his struggles with the bottle are affecting his life. One of the threatened aspects of his life is his job. Jim Tierney, a department chair at the college where Stavros is an assistant professor, is as supportive as he can be. He's spoken to the dean and arranged for Stavros' position to be held for him if he agrees to enter rehab.

But Stavros goes back and forth between self destructive behavior and decisions to follow through on Tierney's suggestions. He meets Mimi while at the detox, a woman with her own troubles whom Stavros believes is the answer to all of his. Another quote from his ex wife shows that this isn't the first time he's believed a single solution could be the answer. *Mixing the right drink, meeting the right woman, landing the best job, it's always been something, something outside of you that's going to make everything all right. Just before we met, remember, Christianity was going to fill you up?*

A mystical side to the novel begins to appear about a quarter of the way through the book when Stavros and Mimi decide to visit a seer named Cassandra. A strange painting hanging in her living room seems to pull them both into its scene. Although we can't be sure what's happening because alcoholism and mental illness could be causing hallucinations, the mystic aspects of the story increase as we read on. As I said before, reality, imagination, and dreams are indistinguishable, but everything is important to Stavros. The painting is tied to other things that happen as the story progresses. In fact, every detail in Peters' novel is tied together beautifully.

Conversations Among Ruins is a powerful book that brings out issues concerning alcoholism and mental illness while pointing out the value of life in a way everyone can appreciate.

Steve Lindahl – author of *Motherless Soul* and *White Horse Regressions*

Avi Morris says

I probably should back away from writing a review so soon after finishing reading Mathew Peters' *Conversations Among Ruins* because of the amorphous swirl of feelings I have right now. But it's probably the best time to write before I let it get away. I'm not going to go into any detail of the story line, there are enough other reviews that accomplish that. I'd rather talk about the writing and the impact of the writing on the effectiveness of the story.

There is a poetry yet a wildness to the prose in this book. It's bold and in your face and then soothing. Its imaginative and ultimately takes the reader on a journey of self discovery. The effect on me is all over the place, and I think that is what Peters set out to do. It tears you to pieces, puts you back together again. It confuses you, sometimes angers you, then makes you ashamed of those feelings. It leads you into a world of unreality and self deception that is all too real for someone caught up in self destructive addiction, and in the case of Peters' protagonist Daniel Stavros case, a related deep depression, I loved the use of stream of consciousness description. The structure of the prose in this book is a proper, effective reflection of Stavros's state of mind.

Perhaps for me it is too personal at the moment. I am heavily involved in matters affecting the life of a talented young person who is caught in web of a deep drug addiction and on a path to nowhere good, just like Stavros. Stavros's behavior so closely mirrors the behavior of my young friend that it was sometimes hard for me to keep reading. Addiction is self-destructive, Addicts are seldom truthful to themselves, let alone the people around them. It is typical for such a person to be comfortable only with people with similar issues, such as in Daniel's relationship with Mimi Dexter. One can only hope that everyone with these issues can make their way to a mystical mountain top and heal.

Mathew Peters makes you feel the addiction. Great job, and in my view ,he tells an important story.

Christina says

turn to alcohol and drugs in the first place, and ends with the inevitable consequence of failing to face the truth about themselves. It's a tale that resonates in today's world where addiction is all too commonplace. We meet college professor Daniel Stavros as he heads into detox, where he becomes instantly enamored of a fellow broken soul, Mimi, making this almost a desperate love story. But addicts are notoriously unreliable and Mimi proves no different. The reader empathizes with Daniel as Mimi deserts him in his hour of need, but she must save herself. The book is realistic - the addict's denial, the scoffing at the detox center's rules, the attempts to violate the rules simply out of resistance, the inevitable relapse, and of course, job loss and other material effects of addiction. It has a literary quality with some lovely, memorable language -- "frost-rimed mornings," "she was so beautiful it hurt to look at her, like sun on snow." Highly recommended for anyone who's either gone through this hell themselves or with a loved one.

P.J. Wetzel says

Deep and intensely captivating from the first page, 'Conversations among Ruins' is a semi-autobiographical psychological thriller/drama/romance composed of two distinct parts: the deterioration of, and the redemption of Daniel Stavros.

I fell in love with part one quickly. The imagery is powerful, the narrative drive compelling, and the language wonderfully lyrical. Before moving into more detail I want to provide an example of Peters' vibrant style:

"His uneasiness changed to anger. He stared at Gail's raven hair and pale skin, the contrast of dark and light like chiaroscuro or a lunar eclipse. Gail had always seemed mysteriously beautiful, somehow high in the sky above him, casting shadows. But she, too, existed in darkness. He wondered how long he'd stay blinded by her silhouette."

Daniel Stavros is a professor at a small university who has both an out of control drinking problem and a mood disorder that seems rooted in his difficult childhood and his aberrant relationship with his troubled mother, Sarah.

The tale opens in a detox ward. We learn that Daniel, though in utter denial and fiercely determined to continue his self-destructive path, is in danger of losing his job. Arriving in the institution is Mimi, young and overtly carefree daughter of a wealthy lawyer. Here begins an intense, sometimes dysfunctional romance that abets Daniel's downward spiral.

Peters' writing is richly descriptive. We do not just witness Daniel's descent into utter depravity, we live it. We feel what Stavros feels. We understand his pain. Mimi is not without her own similar troubles, but hers are more in control. So she is there with him, propping him up as he descends, until at last she becomes his only link to sanity.

And then she dumps him.

Part two, though not formally identified as such, begins when Stavros' empathetic boss hands him a key to an isolated mountain cabin during a poignant scene in which Daniel barely clings to reality.

Or perhaps he doesn't. Part two is figurative and surreal. There is an almost Alice in Wonderland quality to the succession of scenes—a flow that feels like an amusement park ride.

Where will the ride stop? Will the roller coaster derail? Well, I can't divulge that, of course, but I assure you, the ride is worth the price of admission.

Simone Z. Endrich says

Poignant; heartbreakingly realistic

There's something about *Conversations Among Ruins* and its author's inimitable style that draws a reader in from the very first page. An endearing quality about the hero, Dr. Daniel Stavros, that's funny and witty in a self-deprecating way. One is compelled to identify with him, root for him, and feel emotions so strong that it almost feels like he's alive. Hence, despite Stavros' sorry plight – a learned professor of English who is severely afflicted by depression and substance abuse, and whose life was literally brought to a standstill by his struggle with alcohol addiction – I found myself laughing at his quips all the way through the first quarter of the novel.

The mood turns sombre soon after though, when Mimi, the girl he falls in love with during a stint at the

detox centre, lets him down so badly that I cringed and wept with him and wished so much to wring the girl's neck! It's to the author's credit that he packs his writing with so much emotion, one can almost feel oneself drowning in it.

I don't think I'll ever forget the poignant payphone scene, Stavros' moment of truth – the despair, the helpless rage at Mimi's betrayal and abandonment when she doesn't turn up as promised to pick him up. She'd already let him down once before, when she'd failed to attend the family programme group meeting as promised. Typically, Stavros latches on to Mimi as might a drowning man to floating driftwood in a desperate bid to keep himself from drowning. And typically, too, those closest to him turn away from him in his hour of need. Whether it's Sarah, his mother, who is beyond his reach from the grave, or Mimi, the new love of his life, whom he subconsciously hopes to use as replacement, he finds himself bereft and totally alone.

I have to admit I was mighty glad when much later in the novel Mimi was rejected by the Sorbonne! It was poetic justice of a sort. For Stavros and for the reader both!

The delusions that follow are truly heartbreaking if one takes a measure of their implications. In the mind of a man on the edge of madness, they are all too real. Preston, who is also a product of those delusions, plays a significant role in the last chapters, as he leads his charge through various episodes in his life in a mystical way in order that he may find himself. But is it mystical or is it just pure madness? A reader will walk through the labyrinth of Stavros' mind and question how much of it is real, how much of it a product of his hallucinations, and where will it all lead. And will our afflicted hero find his salvation at the end of that terrible journey? That is the question.

Never have I read so poignant and moving an account of the pain endured by alcoholics and the mentally ill. *Conversations Among Ruins* is a powerful, true-to-life depiction of that horror and despair; the vulnerability of such sufferers who find themselves flailing ineffectually in deep water with little hope of rescue; the inevitable lack of empathy by those around them and the dire consequences thereof. For how many loved ones have the capability to truly understand that kind of pain? This novel is a must-read for anyone with a family member who is similarly afflicted. The insight it offers is a bounty one won't easily find in a textbook.

Kenneth Hicks says

I've now read two of the books of author Matthew Peters and, while I give them both five stars and enjoyed reading both mightily, I have found my thoughts drawn back to this novel well past the time I finished the final word. Matthew writes extremely well. His descriptions are beautiful, but more than that, his characters feel real as they pull the reader into their lives. The protagonist of this novel is Daniel Stavros who we find in a detox facility when the book begins and in deep denial that he needs treatment. I know from friends how devastating depression can be and have read about alcohol addiction as well, but now I feel as though I understand what it is like to be inside the depressed alcoholic, trying to make his way. In the facility, Stavros meets a woman who is also suffering and in denial, and they begin a relationship that becomes part of Stavros' obsession with his life and with finding peace within it. You can't help but hope that both will succeed, either alone or together.

Please don't expect a happy book. But expect to come out of the reading of this book with a feeling that you have experienced something both dreadful and wonderful. Amazing job.

L.T. Kelly says

Conversations Among Ruins is primarily about Daniel Stavros, an alcoholic professor who meets and falls in love with the beautiful and mysterious Mimi Dexter whilst in rehab.

The entire thing is heartbreaking. You want to shake Stavros and tell him to get a grip of himself, it's like watching a person ebb away. However, on the other hand, you can feel his pain so strongly from the page that you wish to soothe him and tell him everything is going to be all right. It's such a tumultuous relationship between him and the reader that it makes for a difficult read in the emotional sense.

Mimi is also struggling with her own personal demons, and making an attempt to come to terms with them. I think that Stavros is so invested in their relationship and puts a lot of pressure on her to 'save' him. The problem is that he has to save himself.

The writing is nothing but stellar. Peters is smooth, his style is easy to read and yet the prose is lyrically clever. His scene setting is utter perfection, he leaves little to the imagination without droning on. He transports you to each place with the ease of a true pro.

That's not to say that it's all doom and gloom though. This writer has a knack for making you laugh in the most harrowing of situations. I laughed out loud several times and received a few dodgy looks from those in my presence at the time.

This book knocked me so out of my comfort zone that I struggled with how I wanted to react to it when I finished. This is clearly a novel about an alcoholics journey, but it's so much more than that. Just as I started to get a little more comfortable, the whole thing turned on its head in a way you'd NEVER see coming. Peter's knocked it out of the ballpark and excelled in such a way that I can only compare Conversations Among Ruins with something penned by Tarantino. It's not that it comes out of nowhere either, the author leads you in on a path that ends up at Weirsville, but once you arrive it all feels somehow, well...right.

If you're looking for a book to truly connect with and churn up some emotion then this is undoubtedly the read for you.

Namrata Ganti says

A raw, deep, emotional book, this will give the reader an insight into a troubled soul and the mind of a person dual diagnosed. The author seeks to bring out the troubles of a young professor who wants to avoid confronting his inner demons. When he meets Mimi while in rehab, he falls in love and we are drawn into a world of love, secrets and some amount of mystic is thrown in. Mimi has her own share of secrets and they are forced to decide how to proceed with their lives.

Written beautifully, the author pulls us into Daniel's world of confusion and inebriation. Between the two, we are as confused as Daniel and ultimately imagination and reality seem to merge and the line between them disappears. As with the author's style of writing, all the plot lines in this book are important and come together very well by the end of the story.

We are shown the importance of life along with the necessity and ways of dealing with alcoholism and mental illness. The descriptions are vivid and conversations are thought provoking. There is a message to this book and I am sure many can relate to some of the topics raised in this story. For the style of writing and the concept, I strongly recommend this book which I enjoyed immensely.

Tyler Johnson says

I've just finished reading Matthew Peter's new work of fiction, *Conversations Among Ruins*, that tells the story of Daniel Stavros' struggle with the dual diagnosis of alcoholism and depression. Stavros is a university literature professor whose tenure track job, and entire life, precariously teeters between success and despair for much of the book, as he careens from one bad decision to another.

You can't help but root for Stavros. More than once I found myself shouting, "No, Daniel. Don't do it!" as he is called by darker angels away from a path that would lead him toward a happy future that is so tantalizingly available to him.

He is almost saved by a tender, but deeply wrong, relationship with a charming young woman whose own angels tear at her. Colleagues attempt to support him, at least those who haven't given up. But the one-two punch of the dual diagnosis proves a very tough adversary. In an ending that is reminiscent of the writings of George MacDonald, Stavros comes face to face with the reality he has created.

The title is taken from the Sylvia Plath poem, *Conversations Among the Ruins*, and the allusions to that work, and Plath's own struggles, are not lost in the text. The careful reader will find numerous interconnections among the various parts of this narrative. Peters plays rough with language, and his prose is muscular but accessible. This is an excellent read on its own, but is sure to strike a somber chord with those whose lives have been touched by the dark spirits of substance abuse and depression.

D.M. Denton says

Matthew Peters' raw and yet lyrical novel, *Conversations Among Ruins*, centers on college professor, Daniel Stavros: a man of intellect, imagination and deep experience with a complicated capacity for love—qualities that have been thwarted and manipulated, leaving him unable to live healthily and productively. At war with himself and his personal and professional circumstances, he is caught in the muddy trenches of the past and cross-fire of the present; unlikely to survive let alone believe in and fight for a better future. Through—as the title suggests—a dialogue with all that haunts him, he enables and challenges his debilitating lifestyle and self-hatred in an emotional, psychological and spiritual journey through addiction, denial, obsession, regret and grief. Over and over he fails to make the most of opportunities to recover and renew and it seems he may never get off the rollercoaster ride of compulsive behavior that blurs his perception of where he is, has come from and is going.

"There's no worse cellmate than yourself." For me, much of *Conversations Among Ruins* is about escape, especially from healing. This is not a read for the faint-hearted; but an important one that reaches out beyond Stavros' story, speaking to addictions of all kinds that too often paralyze our emotions, talents and potential for peace and fulfillment. Unapologetically and hypnotically, the novel shows how Stavros' masochistic sense of comfort and companionship in alcoholism, drug abuse and overall obsessiveness, erodes and

excludes important human relationships; sabotages his career; separates him from the simpler pleasures, as with a beloved pet; and overall distorts his view of the truth and significance of his life.

Mr. Peters' writing is effortlessly prosaic and poetic—"The cramped psychiatrist's office, near the nursing station." "A banal, middle-aged man sits stiffly in a roller-chair behind a pressboard desk, eying Stavros like an interesting insect" ... and one of my favorites ... "he cries and bleeds until the stars come out, and then the darkness." The novel presents a stark sometimes cold reality, but has heart and soul and even a mystical perspective. The ending is suspenseful, surprising and relieving, as Stavros unwillingly (at first) and fortuitously detours from his self-destructive path and begins to move through doors that open on new possibilities out of the old; encapsulated in an important message he receives that, hopefully, will allow him to heal after all.

Susan Bernhardt says

Conversations Among Ruins is a novel the likes of which, I have never read. It is a well written account of a man's struggle with addiction and mental illness, i.e. alcohol and depression. It starts out with with Daniel Stavros in a detox ward, his continued employment as a college professor depends on his successful treatment. Daniel meets and falls in love with a woman while there, another addict who holds secrets and problems of her own and obviously isn't good for him or his condition. At one point in the novel when Daniel seems to have lost everything, and I mean everything, he loses even more. Will Daniel Stavros be redeemed? You'll have to read this fascinating, new novel by Matthew Peters to find out.

A psychological thriller, surrealism colors its descriptive pages. When reading this novel, you are right there with Daniel, you are feeling what he is feeling. All of the characters are well-drawn. This excellent, powerful story captivated me from start to finish.

Marylee MacDonald says

This gripping drama took me inside the mind of a smart man so existentially alone he could not tolerate his own company.

I have family members who have struggled with mental illness and with addiction, but I, like anyone else who has not lived that situation from the inside, cannot really grasp what drives individuals to self-destruct. Of course, there's always the endless psychobabble, but if THAT helped, then half an hour of talk therapy would reset the brain, and the stricken person would walk forth and begin a new and better journey. For the first time, I now understand at the gut level how it feels to be on the inside of that experience. This novel is a roller coaster ride, and I was clutching the grab bar all the way.

The author begins the story at the moment when it seems that Daniel Stavros has hit rock bottom. The administration at his university is onto him. His only hope is to go into rehab and clean up his act. While in rehab (think ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST), he falls in love with a young woman who could be his redemption, or whose own demons could sink his already leaky ship.

It is said that readers fall in love with characters who make mistakes. We don't judge them. We hope they'll see the light.

Unfortunately, Daniel Stavros is blind to what awaits him if he doesn't take the rehab biz seriously. We are not. Like Jiminy Cricket, we are perched on his shoulder, whispering urgently in his ear: "Don't tell a lie!" But, Daniel does, over and over, until finally, he has one last chance to save himself.

Read this book. The next time some celeb gets in trouble for leaving rehab early, you'll understand why the hardest thing to face is yourself.

Cynthia Ogren says

Provocative Mind Game!

Matthew Peters' debut novel, *Conversations Among Ruins*, is not for the faint-of-heart reader who likes pretty stories. It's a gritty, uncomfortable look into the downward spiral of chemically addicted Professor Daniel Stavros and his oddly parallel and mysterious girlfriend, Mimi Dexter. We follow the duo through their volatile, brief relationship and feel their emotional pain as they struggle with the monster of addiction. When the relationship ends and Stavros hits bottom, he seeks refuge in a mountain cabin to dry out...or check out. And what occurs as he faces himself and his past in this remote locale makes the delirium tremors of alcohol withdrawal seem like a minor inconvenience. What's even more strange is that miles away, Mimi's actions run strangely parallel.

Conversations Among Ruins consumes us as we commiserate and root for young Daniel Stavros. We feel visceral discomfort watching his decline into possible madness or death. Peters, a masterful writer, weaves a compelling, enigmatic story as he takes us on this dark voyage with Daniel and Mimi. The book lingers, inviting us to ponder its multi-tiered depth long after we turn the last page. I highly recommend this wonderful novel and eagerly look forward to reading more from this talented author!

T.B. Markinson says

What impressed me the most about the novel is the level of confusion. Okay, that might not make sense. Let me try and explain. Daniel is hardly ever lucid and when he is sober, he's being tormented by his personal demons. It's hard to determine what is real and what isn't. I'm guessing this is what it is like for someone living with this disease. For the author to make that real for me is quite a feat.

Not only did the illness become tangible for me, but I was able to see inside Daniel's mind and to understand him to a certain degree. And it made me really appreciate the fact that I don't have to deal with this terrible disease.
